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Should Libraries Add Digitally What They Would Weed Physically?

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Should Libraries Add Digitally What They Would Weed Physically?

Bob Holley

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Summary

- Principles for this session
- Increased demand for resources discovered digitally
- Possible changes to a core function of smaller libraries
- Digital resources may bring the advantages and disadvantages of the research library to the small library

Principles for This Session

A thick, horizontal yellow brushstroke with a textured, painterly appearance, spanning most of the width of the slide.

- Digital resources are different
- Large academic libraries have mostly influenced their development
- Smaller libraries need to think things through and consider unintended consequences

My Role

- I come with questions, not answers
- Tell me where I'm wrong
- I hope the session will be interactive

Nature of Digital Resources

- Access to large quantities of information
- Space independent
- Paid from a multiplicity of sources
- Free
 - No longer under copyright
 - Paid for by advertising
 - Creators want to spread their point of view

Increased Demand for Resources

- Discovery tools like Amazon and Google make resources known to patrons
- If library sponsors these tools, users may reasonably expect it to get the resources
- Less expectation if users find them on their own

Increased Demand for Resources (continued)

- Same argument against making available catalogs of larger libraries
- Image of the candy store
- Smaller library may have the resources as parts of other works
- ILL is a great service but is not “free”

Core Function of the Smaller Library in the Print World



- Providing materials appropriate for the user community
- **NOT** providing materials inappropriate for the user community

Bigger Is Not Always Better

- My favorite public library ever
- The importance of weeding
 - Discard the book where man has not reached the moon
 - Holly Hibner and "Awful Library Books"
 - <http://awfullibrarybooks.net/>
- Not all gift books get added

Bigger Is Not Always Better (continued)

- Not necessarily bad books when they were published but awful or inaccurate now
- Large academic libraries collect “bad” books from the past for the historical record
- Smaller libraries traditionally collect the right resources for right now
- Inappropriate resources from the past make the library more difficult to use

Large Collections of Digital Resources

- Increase the amount of material available to users
- Some collections focus on current materials and weed older outdated items—Good!
- Some provide access to everything available—Questionable!

Large Collections of Digital Resources (continued)

- Google Scholar—more for academic libraries
- Google Books—plans include access in public libraries
- Digital Public Library of America—my focus because of “Public Library” in its name

Digital Public Library of America

➤ Proposed collection of digital resources for libraries

➤ The name may be part of my concern since “public” is ambiguous

➤ Web site

<http://www.theconferencecircuit.com/2011/11/04/the-digital-public-library-of-america-dlpatp:///>

Digital Public Library of America (continued)

- "aggregating collections from research libraries and institutions"
- "will consist primarily of books in the public domain ... and digitized collections made by large libraries independent of Google."
- "Because of copyright law, most current literature will not be in the DPLA."

Digital Public Library of America (continued)

- Does the smaller library that has weeded its collection of outdated and obsolete materials want to bring them back digitally into the collection?
- "Every book published since 1923 is now covered by copyright."

Issues with Such Digital Materials

- Some users may not have the information literacy skills to understand that older materials can be inaccurate and harmful
 - Reason why universities have undergraduate libraries
- May require library staff to monitor use and explain the limitations of these materials

Issues with Such Digital Materials (continued)



➤ The “trust factor”

- “I found it in the library. It must be true.”
- “Don’t the librarians read every item?”

Some Specific Problem Areas

- Inaccurate health information
- Inaccurate legal information
- Outdated information about social issues
- Earlier stereotypes about race, gender, and ethnicity
 - Potential to offend some users

Counter Arguments

- Users of digital resources will be more sophisticated than average users
 - Average users browse rather than use the catalog
- Vast increase in resources is worth the risk

Final Thoughts

- Digital collections dramatically increase the amount of information available to small libraries
- Some of this information may be outdated and potentially harmful
- Would the library add a print copy?
- Bigger is not necessarily better

Final Thoughts (continued)

- Would the library add a “free” print copy if space were available?
- Think things through—the decision is yours

The Big Question

- Is it collection development to add materials just because they are free, whether or not they are useful to our patrons?

Questions



➤ Your turn to ask any questions.